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Rome-Moscow tension persists as Soviet Embassy aide departs

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Rome—A Soviet Embassy official here returned to Moscow on Friday, and Italian newspapers and diplomatic sources reported that it was because he was expelled by the Italian government.

Lt. Col. Ivan Chelak, an aide to the Soviet military attache, left the country because his tour of duty had ended, according to Soviet Embassy officials. But the Italian news agency ANSA said Colonel Chelak had been expelled, for "activities incompatible with his diplomatic position."

The incident was the latest in a series of developments that are straining relations between Italy and the Eastern Bloc.

For days newspapers here have said a full-scale Cold War has broken out between Italy and the Soviet bloc. They have suggested that Communist countries were bent on destabilizing Italy by organizing or inspiring terrorist acts.

Italian newspapers speculated that Colonel Chelak was involved in spying but that his expulsion was not related to allegations that the Soviet Union used Bulgarian agents to engineer the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II May 13, 1981. The attack was carried out by Turkish terrorist Mehmet Ali Agca.

Valery Bibikov, who worked at the Soviet consulate in Turin, was expelled earlier this month for espionage, according to Italian papers. As in the latest case, the Soviets denied that he was expelled, and the Italian Foreign Ministry refused comment.

Newspaper space also has been devoted to details of other supposed instances of Bulgarian wrongdoing, including drug-running, links to the death of former Premier Aldo Moro and a reported scheme against Polish Solidarity leader Lech Walesa.

At the same time, however, inconsistencies in the presumed papal plot raise suspicions that it is perhaps more plausible than probable, a convenient catalyst heightening the current Cold War atmosphere between the superpowers.

Whodunit theories have been advanced almost since the pope was shot, but no proof has surfaced. Even now investigating Judge Ilario Martella has not made his evidence public, and press leaks obviously are open to manipulation.

Even when shorn of embellishment, and whether eventually proven or not, the charges against Bulgaria are diplomatic dynamite. Italy, a small, weak member of the powerful Western alliance, is called upon, as Milan's *Corriere Della Sera* put it, to "hit a small link in a huge chain."

Foreign Minister Emilio Colombo already has recalled Italy's ambassador to Sofia "for consultations."

Italian magistrates investigating the incident in St. Peter's Square claim to have evidence the Bulgarian secret service was behind Agca.

The claim raises the specter of possible KGB involvement in a plot to rid the Soviets of a pontiff whom they saw as fomenting revolution in his native land, Poland.

Italian investigators believe that Sofia was the scene of a \$1.2 million offer to Agca to shoot the pope. Agca's contact there, according to this theory, was a Turkish smuggler and alleged crime boss, Bekir Celenk, who put him in touch with three alleged Bulgarian agents in Italy.

These three are suspected of organizing the attack and providing shelter, a getaway car and other aid for Agca.

Last month Rome police arrested Sergei I. Antonov, head of Bulgaria's Balkan Airline office. He is charged with complicity in the shooting.

Italian authorities also have issued an arrest warrant for Maj. Zhelyo V. Kolev, ex-secretary to the military attache in the Bulgarian Embassy. Magistrates also want to question Todor S. Ayvazov, a former paymaster at the same Embassy who enjoys diplomatic immunity. Both men are in Sofia, Bulgaria's capital.

Four Turks in addition to Agca, who is serving a life prison sentence

in Italy, also have been implicated.

Under Italian law magistrates' inquiries are secret, but Judge Martella's evidence of Bulgarian involvement is believed to come from Agca himself.

During his trial in the summer of 1981 Agca insisted he acted alone. He refused to appeal the life sentence, the maximum penalty Italy metes out, repeating a demand that he be tried by the Vatican. If his request were not granted, he said, he would begin a hunger strike—an ultimatum taken by many as a veiled warning to accomplices that he would talk if not rescued.

Now he is talking, but not necessarily truthfully.

Some facts corroborate his tale, including telephone numbers of the three Bulgarians and a description of Mr. Antonov's apartment, where he said he spent several days before the shooting.

But Agca repeatedly has changed his story, and some facts did not check out. Reportedly he told magistrates that two accomplices, one of them Mr. Antonov, were with him in St. Peter's Square during the attack. Mr. Antonov's co-workers, however, vouched for his presence in the office.

If, moreover, Mr. Antonov were truly an accessory, his continued presence in Rome after Agca's capture would seem to be folly, especially as Bulgarian diplomats reportedly knew last September that Agca had pointed the finger at a "Bulgarian connection."

Bulgaria has seized on these inconsistencies to deny the connection. Like the Soviet news agency Tass, Bulgaria's BTA news service suggested that Agca, with his known past links to the right-wing Grey Wolves, was more likely a tool of the CIA than of East European secret services.

BTA's magazine *Pogled* pointed out, though—as have Italian newspapers—that Agca might be talking, even wildly, in order to benefit from mitigated sentences Italy concedes to terrorists who turn state's evidence.

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